

COTTON CLUB

66

Keep \$2000 Limit

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By Pam Goertler #R-3432

WEST SIDE STORY



A story of the clubs and casinos in segregated Las Vegas

My husband and I love the mementos of “old” Nevada. We love the chips and the dice, the postcards and the glassware, the ashtrays, swizzle sticks, menus, matchbooks and just about anything that comes from the Nevada of the 1930’s through the 1970’s. That was a time when Las Vegas still had a small-town feel, while it sparkled with glitz and glamour. But, behind her neon façade, Las Vegas had another side...

The Westside.



Living conditions on the Westside of Las Vegas in 1942.

The Westside was where Las Vegas’s black population was forced to live. But times changed and Las Vegas was forced to change, too. There’s still a few artifacts left from those early Westside times... a few chips, dice and photos are in collector’s hands. When you look at your collectibles, do you know where they really came from, or do you just see little clay discs and celluloid cubes? Let’s go back and see where those artifacts originated....

Humble Beginnings

In 1882, Archibald and Helen Stewart moved to a 960 acre ranch and farm in the Las Vegas Valley. They grew crops, made wine from their grapes, and raised cattle; selling the food to miners and to travelers headed west. Many times wagon trains would stop at the ranch to replenish their supplies, and would camp on the Stewart property for as long as a week, to rest.



Hellen Stewart

rode to the Kiel ranch. Later in the day, Helen Stewart heard a rider approaching. She expected it to be her husband, instead it was a hand from the Kiel ranch bringing a note that said “Mrs Sturd send a team and take Mr. Sturd away he is dead. C. Kiel.” Archie had been murdered, leaving behind his pregnant wife and four children.

Mrs. Stewart continued to live at the ranch, taking over the management of the day-to-day activities. She also bought more land, more than doubling the size of the ranch.

Another major ranch in the valley was the Kiel Ranch, located in an area that is now North Las Vegas. One fateful day in 1884, Archie Stewart

It was reported that Montana Senator William Clark did not always follow a straight and narrow path. In fact, one article said that most of the bills passed by Senator Clark were of the \$1,000 variety! Senator Clark was part owner of the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake railroad, and knew exactly what path it would take through Nevada. He decided to buy some land and build a town. The land he wanted was owned by Mrs. Stewart.

J. T. Mc Williams was a surveyor who was hired to survey the 1800-acre property that Senator Clark would buy from Mrs. Stewart, with water rights, for \$55,000. During his surveying, McWilliams discovered an 80-acre tract of land that was unclaimed. He filed a claim, and took that tract himself. On today’s map, the McWilliams claim would be bordered by A and H Streets, Bonanza and Washington, on the west side of the tracks.

McWilliams divided his property into lots, and laid out a town-site. Promising graded roads and fresh spring water for residents, he sold several lots, for as little as \$100 each, to miners, cowboys and rail workers. Immigrants also took advantage of the offer of cheap land; Chinese, Mexicans, Native Americans, Italians, Spaniards and more. By early 1905 the population approached 1500. Homes and businesses were erected on the lots, but building materials were scarce, so many were constructed of canvas over a wooden frame. However, McWilliams didn't make many improvements to the community. There was no sewage system and no paved roads. Clark had bought all the water rights from Mrs. Stewart, and refused to provide water to the McWilliams townsite. With the canvas construction, bits and pieces of the town flopped loose and even blew away from time to time, earning the town the nickname of "Ragtown".

When Senator Clark began his land auction on May 15, 1905, there were 3,000 people in attendance. Bidding reached a fever-pitch for the prime lots on Fremont Street, causing some of the lots to sell for double their initial value. By the time it was over, Clark had sold more than 600 lots for more than \$265,000... nearly 500% profit. Many frustrated residents of "Ragtown" bought lots from Clark, and by the end of the auction dozens of the canvas tents that had housed businesses on the west side of the tracks had been moved to the east side to set up shop. Four months later, a fire swept through what was left of the McWilliams town site, destroying most of it.

Jobs

In 1928, when the rest of the country was in a depression, Congress authorized the funds to build Boulder Dam (now Hoover

Dam). Help wanted ads were taken out nationwide, causing thousands of laborers to migrate to the Las Vegas area. During the peak construction period, 5251 workers were employed on the project. When the dam was completed, some of the workers drifted away from the area to find their next job, others stayed in the area which helped the population to grow.

By the late 1930's, the country hadn't fully recovered from the depression and the Las Vegas economy was in a recession. When the United States entered World War II, the government again rescued the Las Vegas economy by establishing the Las Vegas Army Air Gunnery Range, which eventually became Nellis Air Force Base. Another government program established the Basic Magnesium Plant, in Henderson, which ultimately employed well over 10,000 people. During the war years, the population of Clark County jumped from 16,000 to more than 48,000 people.

Segregation

Some of the early settlers of the Las Vegas Valley were black. In the early days, blacks bought land, began businesses, and were a part of the Las Vegas Community. Then Las Vegas began to adopt "Jim Crow" laws, which established segregation in the town. Of the 5,000 workers that were employed on the dam, only 11 were black. The Basic Magnesium Plant, however, recruited many blacks from the Southern states, to fill a critical shortage of workers. The government established the Carver Park housing project, in



1905 Land auction of Clark's Las Vegas Townsite east of the Railroad tracks
- Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections.



Housing for workers at the Basic Magnesium Plant
Henserson, Nevada, April 1942.
Photo Courtesy UNLV -Dickinson Library Special Collections



A "court" where cabins and tents could be rented for the
workers at the Basic Magnesium Plant.
Photo Courtesy UNLV -Dickinson Library Special Collections

Henderson, for black workers and their families. Henderson's white community was on the opposite side of Boulder Highway.

In Las Vegas, the blacks were forced to live in West Las Vegas, which included the McWilliams townsite. Segregation, a growing population and cheap land resulted in crowded conditions on the Westside. Unfortunately, living conditions were slow to improve. In the early 1930's, with financial assistance from the government, Las Vegas paved miles of roads, installed sidewalks, gutters, curbs and drainage facilities. City parks were developed, and even a small

municipal golf course. None of these improvements reached the Westside.

After the war the healthy Las Vegas economy was due, in large part, to tourism and gambling. Large resorts were being built, and many of the housekeeping and kitchen staff were black. Big name entertainers were hired for the showrooms, and some of the entertainers were black, including Sammy Davis Jr. Because of the Jim Crow laws, black entertainers were not allowed to stay at the hotels where they performed. Nor were they, or any other blacks, allowed to gamble in the casinos

on the strip or downtown. The Westside was the only community where blacks could socialize. In 1945 Sammy Davis Jr., as part of the Will Mastin Trio, made his first appearance in Las Vegas... at the El Rancho Vegas. The group was paid \$500 a week, worked with the biggest back-up band they'd ever had and had a comfortable, modern stage to work on. They were ecstatic, and the rehearsal commenced. After rehearsal, they asked about their rooms, the manager responded "We can't let you have rooms here. You'll have to find a place on the other side of town." It was like a slap in the face that Davis never forgot. In Davis's words:

"We were performing at the hotel, but we couldn't stay there. We couldn't eat there. We couldn't gamble in the casino. We couldn't walk in the front door. In Vegas, for twenty minutes, our skin had no color. Then, the second we stepped off the stage, we were colored again... The other acts could gamble or sit in the lounge and have a drink, but we had to leave through the kitchen, with the garbage. I was dying to grab a look into the casino, just to see what it was like, but I was damned if I would let anyone see me with my nose against the candy-store window."

In the February 23, 1952 edition of “Jack Cortez’s Fabulous Las Vegas” magazine, there was a column by Pearl Bailey. Here’s what she had to say about it:

“Quite a thing at the Last Frontier Wednesday night, given by the Westside Community Center. I heartily agree that the Westside needs MANY, MANY improvements; sewage, housing, lighting, oh, so much there’s not space to mention. This town is growing too fast to have such a terrible condition as exists over on that side. When performers come here to play, there’s no place to stay; and please remember, these folks have some pretty nice places they call “home,” so are not used to such conditions. Then, too, how about the folks already calling this “home”? All I gotta say is something should be done to let ALL our wonderful town grow together. Since this happens to be “Brotherhood Week,” what’s wrong with starting now?”

Westside Clubs



Cotton Club - 500 Jackson Street - Photo Courtesy of James Campiglia

Now you have the background. You know how and why the Westside came about. Most of the Westside residents had jobs; there was no reason for them to remain in town if they didn’t. But, their presence was no longer welcome downtown or on the strip, neither was their money. They had to establish and patronize their own stores, garages, barbershops, restaurants and clubs. Because the community wasn’t acknowledged by mainstream Las Vegas, and because many of the clubs were only open for months instead of years, it’s hard to find information on the black clubs... but here’s what I was able to find.

poor, somewhat dangerous part of town, but it wasn’t always that way. It was simply the center of a community of people whose skin was a different color, at least until race riots began.

Jackson Street

Jackson Street was the business and social center of the Westside, much as Fremont Street was the center of downtown. Now we consider Jackson Street to be a



World Heavyweight Champion from 1962 - 1964 and Las Vegas resident, Sonny Liston outside of the Cove Hotel
Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections.

Carver House

400 W. Jackson St., 7/7/61 – 1965



Carver House Circa 1962 - Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections



Carver House interior Circa 1962 - Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections

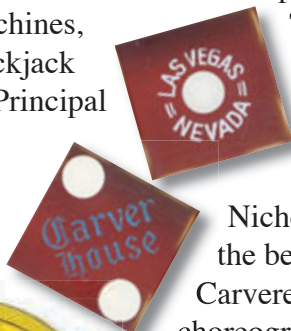
The 88-room Carver House Hotel opened in July of 1961, at the corner of D and Jackson Streets. The Hotel was complete with a lounge bar, swimming pool, coffee shop, men's clothing shop, 24-hour beauty and barber shops and a restaurant named Mr. B's Supper Club. The rooms began at \$8 for the general public, with special rates available to select groups. The casino formally opened on July first, with 32 slot machines, two craps tables, four blackjack tables, and a keno game. Principal

owners were Paul Woodward, Abe Cohen and George Smith Jr.

The Carver House, which touted itself as an Interracial Hotel & Casino, offered flights from Burbank for as low as \$10, which included Champagne served en route, limousine service, and the sepia show "Le Jazz Hot" that played in Mr. B's.

The show was presented by Billy Eckstein and Sammy Davis Jr. It starred John Bubbles,

Nichelle Nicole, and the beautiful Carverettes. It was choreographed by Lon Fontaine, and the orchestra was led by Eagle I. Shield.



Cove Hotel

400 W. Jackson St.,
12/3/65 – 11/25/66

It was difficult for the blacks to get loans to buy property, which is one reason that many of the clubs were owned by Chinese Americans. Businesswoman Sarann Knight Preddy recalls that it was not unusual to see a big shiny car parked in front of a shack, because everyone was working and had money, but blacks just couldn't seem to qualify for home loans. Boxer Joe Louis owned the Cove Hotel, making it one of the few black-owned casinos. The Cove was licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and Bingo.



The Cove Hotel took out a display ad in the yellow pages of the 1966 Las Vegas phone book. Las Vegas is a desert town... right? The Cove Hotel was on the Westside, which catered to blacks... right? So can anyone explain why the picture in the yellow pages ad is a white man surfing...??



Clarence Ray deals Blackjack at The Cove - Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections



Cotton Club

500 Jackson St., 1944 – 1957

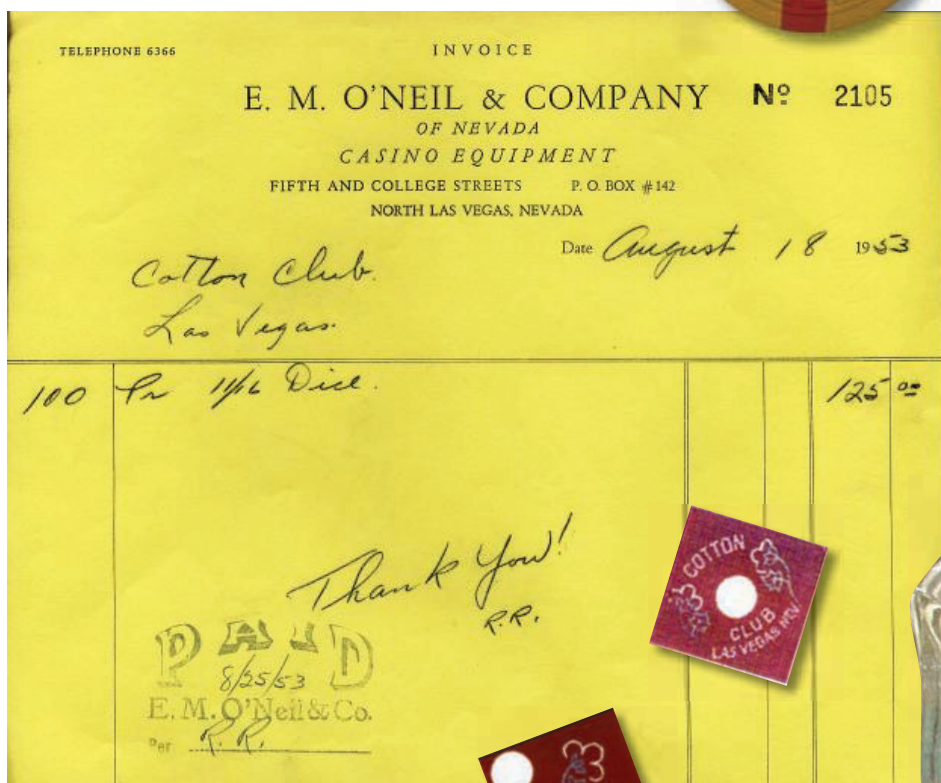


Cotton Club - Photo Courtesy of James Campiglia

The Cotton Club opened as a small bar in 1944, with a few slot machines and a racehorse keno game. The club was opened by Moe Taub, near the Army Air Base, to give the black servicemen a place to gamble. Of course other blacks gambled there too, and it wasn't long before a blackjack table and a couple of poker tables were added to the club. All of the black entertainers had to sleep on the Westside, so they would often go to the

Westside clubs after performing on the strip. Sometimes they gambled, sometimes they put on an impromptu performance. It's been said that the residents of the Westside got to see the same acts that the people attending shows on the strip got to see...but on the Westside, they were free! On occasion, Louis Armstrong would walk into the Cotton Club, with his horn, and the place would jump until dawn.

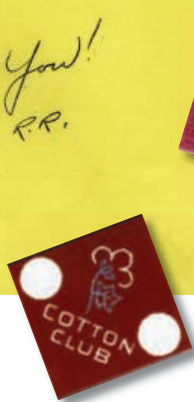
In July of 1947, the club was sold to Jodie Cannon who ran it for just under 6 months before selling it to Uvalde Caperton, a black man. Caperton owned the club until 1957. According to the 1953 Las Vegas City Directory, Jodie Cannon was the manager of the Cotton Club, so it sounds like he stayed on after selling the place. Then again, the City Directory shows that Uvalde Caperton was a bookkeeper for the Cotton Club, in 1953.



The pictures shown from the Cotton Club are courtesy of James Campiglia and Scott Jaske. One hot afternoon James and Scott went to the Westside and started knocking on doors, in search of gaming history. They came away from their hunt with Cotton Club pictures, Brown Derby chips, and three brand-new red blackjack layouts from the Brown Derby... and stories of the adventure!

Sarann Knight Preddy moved from Oklahoma to Las Vegas, with her husband and parents, when she was 22 years old. They settled on the Westside, and Preddy went to the business district on Jackson Street to look for a job. She soon became a keno writer for the Cotton Club. That was one stepping stone for Preddy, who would later become the first black woman to own a Nevada gaming license.

Photo Courtesy of Rick Olsen



Love's Cocktail Lounge

(Love & Lee's)

400 W. Jackson St.,
12/3/65 – 11/25/66

As the name of the club indicates, this was primarily a cocktail lounge that was owned by Jimmy Love and Joe Lee Robertson. Being in Las Vegas, it seems that every bar has to have gambling... at least a few slot machines. Apparently, in the case of Love's and Lee's, it was four slot machines and one poker table. I think this was one of the addresses that my husband and I tried to find in 2002... and all we found a vacant lot.



Love's Cocktail Lounge interior - Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections



Co-Owner Jimmy Love
behind Musicians
Photo Courtesy of
UNLV Special Collections

C's Cotton Club

500 W. Jackson St.,
1989 – ?

All I could find about C's Cotton Club is that it was a slot casino... no table games.

Green Lantern

501 Jackson St., 1/5/45 – 1947

The Green Lantern opened up across the street from the Cotton Club with a license that was restricted to slots and craps. Trying to draw from the same customer base as the popular Cotton Club, but having a more restricted license, the Green Lantern was unable to survive and closed after just a couple of years.

Round Up Casino

501 Jackson St., 1/8/47 – 1948

After the Green Lantern closed the property opened again, this time as the Round Up Casino. The Round Up was licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and poker. It's been said that the Round Up was located near the city hall, and sometimes city officials would gather there for lunch.

Ebony Club/Club Ebony

501 Jackson St., 1/15/48 – 1949

Licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and poker.

Harvey Fuller learned how to investigate while working for the Los Angeles Police Department. When he began collecting casino chips he realized that the history of the chips and casinos was disappearing, so he used his investigative skills to find and preserve all of the Nevada casino history that he could. Harvey is gone now, but his notes have been passed on to others who love the history as Harvey did. Doug Saito has some of Harvey's notes and he tells us of a 1984 interview that Harvey had with Charlie Winder, a black owner of Westside casinos. In that interview, Charlie told Harvey that the craps and blackjack games at Club Ebony were called "round table" games.

It sounded like the games were player-backed, and the house would take a cut of each game. According to Charlie, most of the operators didn't have enough money to back the games.

Silver Club & Cafe

505 ½ Jackson St.,
7/26/56 – 3/31/57
Re-opened 1962 – 1963

Fuller shows this club was owned by Millhizer during its 1956 – 1957 operations, licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and poker. The club was reopened in 1962 – 1963, by Charlie Winder, and again was licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and poker.

Low Cost Games

506 Jackson St.,
5/6/64 – 2/16/67

After selling their interests in The Little Casino, across the street, Charles Winder and Charlie Hills bought a restaurant... and turned it into the Low Cost Games Casino. Licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and poker, the casino used chips with LCG initials on them.

The Little Casino

507 Jackson St.,
11/6/63 – 3/31/64

Charles Winder and Charlie Hills were licensed to operate slots, blackjack and poker at The Little Casino, and that's all the information I could find.

Town Tavern

600 Jackson St.,
7/5/55 – 7/6/59

Dee Dee Cotton was a dancer, and the first black cocktail waitress on the Las Vegas Strip. She remembers that when she moved to Las Vegas in 1957 the Town Tavern was "the" place to go. She'd get off work after the late show, after midnight, and would head over to the Town Tavern, with a group of other dancers. There were a couple of blackjack tables and a couple of craps tables, but it was the lounge they went to. The local guys would buy drinks for her and the other lovely ladies.

She remembers that a man named Earl Thurman would get up and sing, and then everyone else would also get up and sing or maybe dance. Often entertainers would come out after their late shows and the joint would party until dawn.

I think Earl Thurman must have been a classy guy, because it was during his reign that the Town

Tavern used the Top Hat with gloves and cane logo, one of my favorites, on matches, chips and dice.



New Town Tavern

600 Jackson St.,
7/6/59 – 12/30/70
Reopen 1981 – 1993
Town Tavern

The Town Tavern, New Town Tavern and Ultra New Town Tavern had several ownership changes, and opened and closed several times over the years. Some of the New Town Tavern chips are initialed “FF”, which probably indicate the club owners from that time, Gin Fong and Sui Mon Fong.

There was an ad in the July 1989 yellow pages advertising that the New Town Tavern is open 24 hours, and they offer 21, craps, keno, slots and poker... as well as a touch of soulful live entertainment.



New Town Tavern - Top hat and white gloves sign matches earlier Small Crown Chips - Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections



NEW TOWN TAVERN
FOR A TOUCH OF SOULFUL LIVE
ENTERTAINMENT-DINING-SHOPPING
BANQUET & RECEPTION FACILITIES
• NEWLY REMODELED ART &
GIFT SHOP •
21-CRAPS-KENO-SLOTS-POKER
• OPEN 24 HOURS •
600 Jackson Av LV..... 647-3995



New Town Tavern interior - Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections



“Little Lee” dealing craps at
New Town Tavern
Photo Courtesy of
UNLV Special Collections



Ultra New Town Tavern

600 Jackson St.,
1993 – present

One sunny afternoon, in September of 2002, armed with a list of addresses, my husband and I drove to the Westside to explore. We searched in vain for the buildings that had housed the Carver House Casino and the Cove Hotel. There were no remains from the Cotton Club or Club Harlem... just empty lots where casinos had been. However, we did find the Ultra New Town Tavern, and took a picture of it for the photo album. What we didn't do was get out of the car, as the neighborhood had a rather unsavory reputation.



A website says that The Ultra New Town Tavern started in 1980 as a hotel/motel operation, with estimated annual sales of \$300,000. Are we talking about the same Ultra New Town Tavern...? I didn't know they had rooms!?

Another website says the New Town Tavern is the place to go on the nights that you don't feel like paying \$12 for a drink... "They may be cheaper, they're definitely not weaker." The site also says the NTT has 36 slots and 2 table games. They have the Sunrise Restaurant in addition to the New Town Tavern Bar.

Square Deal Club

1322 North E St.,
1/1/44 – 45

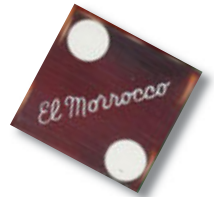
Starting around 1943, Las Vegas officials refused to renew business licenses for blacks unless they moved the business to the Westside. White business owners began putting up signs refusing to serve blacks, forcing the blacks to go to the Westside for anything they needed. This forced the blacks to move to the Westside. Out on the strip, the sprawling El Rancho Vegas and The Last Frontier were open. In comparison, the Westside clubs were small, though not much smaller than some of the downtown clubs. These were the conditions when the Square Deal Club opened in 1944, licensed for slots, craps and poker. The Square Deal Club lasted just a year before it was sold, and reopened as the El Morocco Club.

El Morocco Club

1322 North E. St.,
1/5/45 – 55 & 1957 – 1958

Frank Wilson was the owner of the El Morocco Club when it opened as a bar with slot machines. One source that I used said that the El Morocco was closed by the police in 1948, but that it reopened. No reason was given for the closing. Another source said that a police commissioner forced the closing of a West Las Vegas tavern for “catering to an interracial clientele”... that source didn’t say which tavern so I can’t help but wonder if that was the El Morocco Club? Maybe the zebra logo was symbolic? Regardless of why it was closed, the El Morocco reopened and added blackjack, craps and poker tables. Business was good until 1955, when it was destroyed by a fire.

A new owner rebuilt and reopened the El Morocco from 1957-1958. Then the building sat empty for two years, neglected by everyone except vandals. Vandalism caused the building to be dangerous so it was condemned, and then razed by the city.



Craps at the El Morocco Club - Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections

New El Morocco Club

1322 North E St.,
3/11/59-2/9/60 & 10/2/63-4/28/64

Fuller shows that the New El Morocco opened on March 11, 1959, with Oscar Crozier being one of the owners, and a closing date of February 9, 1960. The year 1960 was an important year for blacks in Las Vegas, as it was the year that segregation was officially ended. Oscar Crozier played an important role. He was the liaison between the Strip casino owners and James McMillan, the president of the local NAACP.

Fuller shows another incarnation of the New El Morocco opening on October 2, 1963 with Val Ruggerio as one of the owners. The closing date that he shows is April 28, 1964. He shows licenses for slots, blackjack, craps and poker under both ownerships. From the New El Morocco, Val Ruggerio went to Reno and in April of 1966 opened Val’s Place in partnership with Gene Bell.



Chic A Dee Club

1314 North F St.,
c. 1955

I found a few paragraphs about Chinese Americans that operated casinos, with blacks as their target audience. It referred to Zee Louie's Chickadee Club (later called the Louisiana Club), which closed in 1957 when Louie moved to San Francisco. Fuller has no listing for a Chickadee Club. TGT lists "Chic-A Dee Club, Las Vegas, NV, Owner: Jim & Willie, Opened: 1940's Closed: 1940's".

With no listing in Fuller, and a different spelling and no address in TGT, I started looking in phone books. The August 1955, Nevada phone book had the Chic A Dee Club at 1314 North F Street (which was not the same address used by the Louisiana Club). The 1956 phone book doesn't have listings for the Louisiana Club or the Chic A Dee Club. I did find a listing in the 1966 phone book for the Louisiana Club, which confirms the street address of 1322. I'm guessing that the two clubs could have been in the same building, but accessed by different entrances?

Louisiana Club

1322 North F St.,
8/16/55 – 5/20/70

The Louisiana Club was licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and keno. One set of Louisiana Club chips is marked with "Z L" for Zee Louie (aka Zhei Lhou or Zee Looie), who owned the club from April 19, 1966, until it closed on May 20, 1970. Does this mean that Zee Louie came back from San Francisco? Your guess is as good as mine, but those dates came from Harvey Fuller... and I'll take his word for it. Another issue of the Louisiana Club chips is marked with a "W", and Fuller says that Wong was the owner of the club from its opening on August 16, 1955 until April 18, 1966, the day before Louie took it over.

Westside Club

1400-1402 F St.,
1943 – ??

Fuller doesn't list the Westside Club. TGT has this listing: "Westside Club, Las Vegas, NV, opened 1943 closed: yes". No address is listed. Information is minimal, but I found this reference: "In Las Vegas several Chinese Americans

under the leadership of Harry Lee Fong and Rose Fong opened the West Side Club in the early 1940s to cater to African American customers, who were not welcomed in the major casinos."

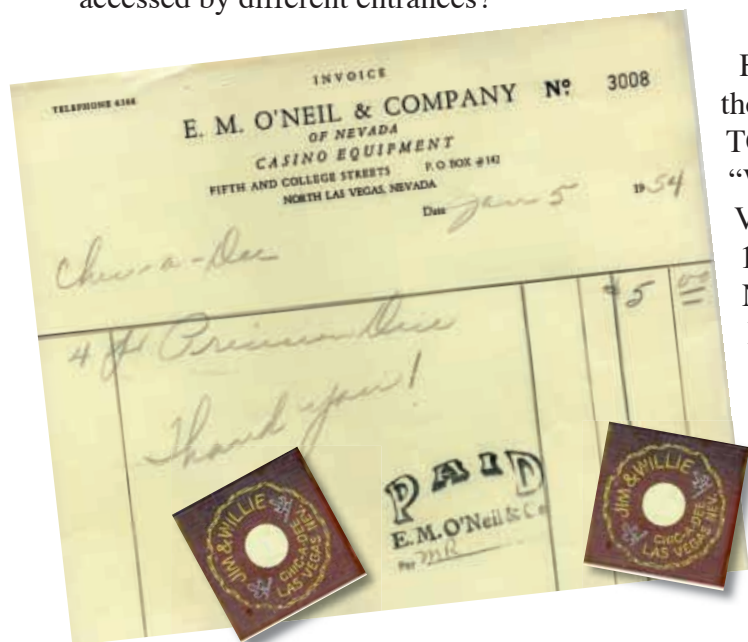
Club Alabama

(Smokey Joe's Club Alabama)

1400 F St., 5/1943 – 7/1943

While researching this article, I happened to receive my current issue of "Chip Chat" from and by, club member and casino historian extraordinaire, Doug Saito. Doug quotes an advertisement for a new club, from the May 14, 1943 issue of the Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal "Formerly the Westside Club. Jackson and F Street. Smokey Joe's Club Alabama. Gaming. Drinks. Cocktail Lounge. Smokey Joe LaDue, owner."

When I searched for Smokey Joe LaDue on the internet, I found an actor! In an episode of Gunsmoke, from 1947! But I couldn't find a picture or a biography... wonder if it was the same one??



Harlem Club

End of F St.,
1/7/44 – c.1945

Camp Clipper was part of the Desert Training Center, south of Vegas, and had several regiments of black soldiers. Camp Siebert in Boulder City had some all-black units that were in charge of guarding Boulder dam. Booze, women and gambling were as close as Las Vegas so, with weekend passes in hand, soldiers in need of R & R would head for town. In an attempt to avoid race riots, which were happening in other parts of the country, the Las Vegas police actively worked to keep the black soldiers on the Westside, where there was a USO Club available for their recreation. Despite that, violence periodically broke out.

In January of 1944 a group of about 50 black soldiers, who'd been drinking in the Harlem Club, came out and trashed the nearby Brown Derby. Police moved in and one soldier was killed, and others were injured in the riot that broke out. This resulted in the West Coast Defense Command temporarily making Las Vegas "off limits" to servicemen.

Black Orchid

632 North H St.,
8/1/66 – 10/30/69

Slots only

El Rio Tavern

1905 North H St.,
5/7/54 – 4/28/64

William Kee and his brother Frank, were born and raised in Hawthorne, Nevada. From 1954-1957 they owned and managed the El Rio Club. They targeted the same clientele as the nearby Louisiana Club, and offered low-limit gambling and good food, Chinese as well as American. The El Rio Club hired blacks and Chinese Americans, then provided the training needed for them to be dealers. While not as prosperous as the downtown or strip casinos, the Kee brothers lived very comfortably from the proceeds of the El Rio. When Bill Kee died, Frank took over as manager of the casino for a short time, then closed the club and moved to California. A group of Chinese Americans bought the El Rio and kept it open until 1964.



Photo Courtesy
of UNLV Special
Collections



Bartender S.D. Franklin
Photo Courtesy of UNLV
Special Collections



Craps at the El Rio Club - Dealer on left is Howard King, a local boxer
Photo Courtesy of UNLV Special Collections



El Rio Club, Raleigh Hughes

3/8/73 – 7/6/78

During the Hughes ownership, the El Rio became known for the best barbeque and soul food in the neighborhood.

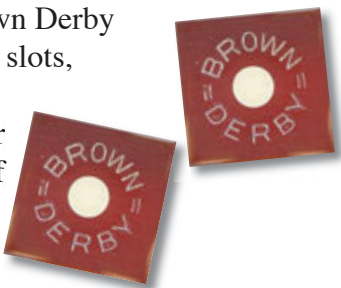
In 1978 the El Rio was seized by the IRS for non-payment of taxes.



Brown Derby

320 West Monroe,
1944 – 1947 & 1950 – 1973

The name was the same as the famed Hollywood Restaurant, but that's where the similarity ended. The Brown Derby was licensed for slots, blackjack, craps and poker, under the ownership of Percy Jefferson.



In 1944 the Brown Derby was wrecked by a group of black soldiers. A riot erupted, during which one soldier was killed and others were injured. The Derby was rebuilt and continued with business as usual until it closed in 1947.

On Christmas Eve in 1950, someone named Ensley reopened the Brown Derby and had it until 1952. In 1952 it was sold to Jefferson... could it have been the same Percy Jefferson? Jefferson sold it to Smith, circa 1973, and Smith closed it on September 30, 1974. In the early 1970's local R&B group "Pure Hell" provided entertainment for the customers.

New Brown Derby

1979 – 8/83

From 1979 until August of 1983, the club was resurrected as the New Brown Derby.



People's Choice

805 West Owens, 10/80 – 1980's?

Sarann Preddy started her career in gambling by writing keno tickets, but she learned other casino

games, too; craps, poker and blackjack. In the early 1950's she and her husband moved to Hawthorne,

where there was one club for blacks. The club was for sale, so she borrowed \$600 from her father, bought the club and became the first black woman in Nevada to receive a non-restricted gaming license.



Several years later she sold the club and returned to Las Vegas. It was the 1960's and Las Vegas had an ordinance that prohibited women from dealing or supervising casino games. Preddy went to work for Jerry's Nugget, which was in North Las Vegas and was not governed by the ordinance.

Eventually the entrepreneurial urge rose again, and she opened the People's Choice Casino on Owens Avenue and H Street. The usual references don't have a closing date for the People's Choice, but it's listed in the 1989 phone book.

Westside Story

901 West Owens,
1980 – 2/81

Fuller says open from 1980-1981, TGT says 1981-1982. They do agree that this club was only open for a year or so. It operated mainly as a bar and restaurant. It was licensed for slot machines, so presumably there were a few. The chips that are out there would have been used on poker tables, the only gaming tables that the Westside Story was licensed for.



B.J.'s Lounge

901 West Owens,
1990 –

Black Orchid

938 West Owens,
1/1/65 – 12/5/65

Licensed for slots, blackjack and craps. Chips and dice have been found from this club, which was open for less than a year. Two owners of the Club were P.L. Jefferson and Boysie Ensley, who also owned the Brown Derby at one time.



Heritage Lounge

2012 West Owens,
1993 –

Apparently the Heritage Lounge is still open. When looking for information, all I could come up with was a review on the internet. It said "A dive located in one of the rougher ends of town."

Moulin Rouge

900 West Bonanza,
5/24/55 – 5/18/59?

The Moulin Rouge was on the west side of the tracks, but it wasn't in the center of the Westside Community... it was on the edge. There were a lot of other differences between the Moulin Rouge and the other Westside Clubs that are named in this article. More on that in the next issue of the Casino Chips and Token News Magazine....

Special thanks to Brian Cashman, James Campiglia, Steve Bedo, Mark Englebretson, Paul Gregory, Rick Olsen, Phil Jensen, Don Leuders and Eric Miller for the chip, matchbook, keno ticket, dice order and ashtray scans. Thank you, James Campiglia and Scott Jaske, for making the trip to the Westside and for sharing the pictures that you rescued.

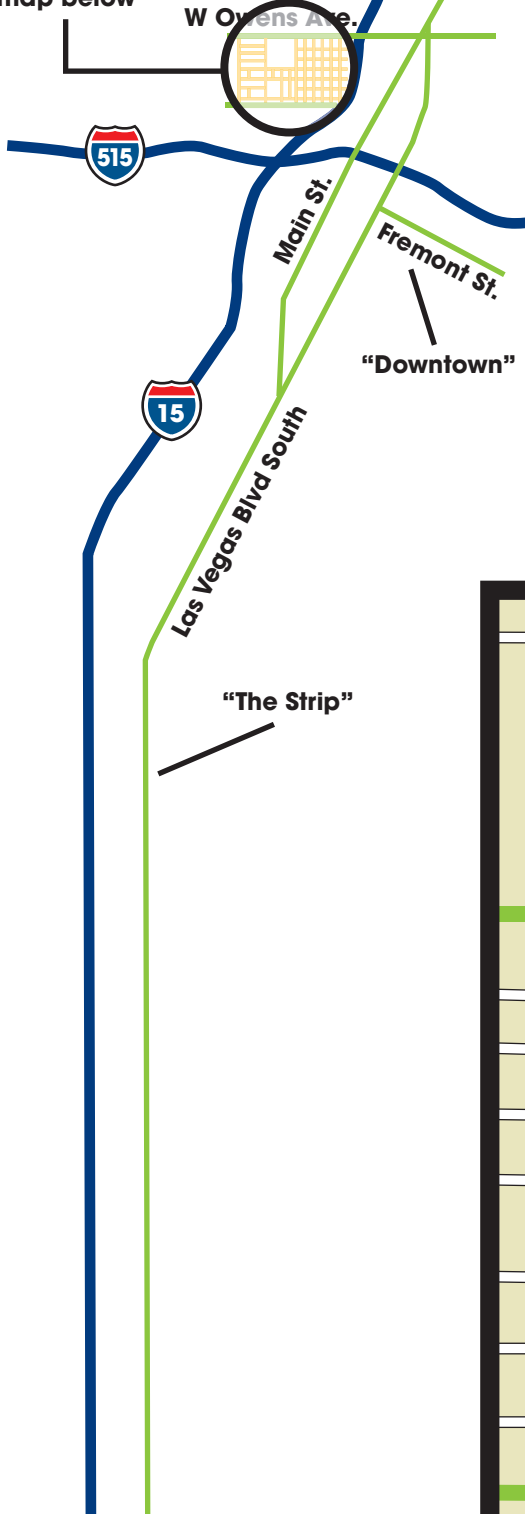
Extra special thanks to our editor, Todd Barrett, for going to the UNLV Library and finding many of the pictures that are included here. Great job, Todd!

Note: In verifying names, addresses and dates of operation I've referred to Fuller and TGT. Fuller is "Harvey J. Fuller's Index of Nevada Gambling Establishments". Harvey Fuller spent years researching Nevada casino history, including combing through the records of the Gaming Commission to establish license dates. Howard Herz organized the information for the book, which was copyrighted in 1992. TGT refers to "The Gaming Table, Chip, Check and Token Collectors' Guide", audit copy for 3rd edition. It was written and published by club members Allan Myers, Ernest Wheelden and Michael Knapp, and lists names, addresses and operating dates for all known casinos.

All information in the article is correct, to the best of my knowledge. However, a lot of different sources were used and they were not always in agreement in the information that they provided.

Location Details

"The Westside"
See detail
map below



1 - 400 W. Jackson

Carver House
1961 - 1965

Cove Hotel
1965 - 1966

2 - 500 W. Jackson

Cotton Club
1944 - 1957

Love's Cocktail Lounge
1970 - 1985

3 - 501 W. Jackson

Green Lantern
1945 - 1947

Round Up Casino
1947 - 1948

Ebony Club/Club Ebony
1948 - 1949

4 - 600 W. Jackson

Town Tavern
1955 - 1959

New Town Tavern
1959 - 1970

Ultra New Town Tavern
1970 - current

5 - 1322 N. E Street

Square Deal Club
1944 - 1945

El Morocco Club
1945 - 1955

1957 - 1958

New El Morocco Club
1959 - 1964

Louisiana Club
1955 - 1970

6 - 1400 F Street

Westside Club
1943? - ?

Club Alabama
(Smokey Joe's)
1943

7 - 1905 N. H Street

El Rio Tavern
1954 - 1964

El Rio Club
1973 - 1978

8 - 320 W. Monroe

Brown Derby
1944 - 1947

1950 - 1973

New Brown Derby
1979 - 1983

9 - 805 W. Owens

People's Choice
1980

10 - 901 W. Owens

Westside Story
1980 - 1981

B.J.'s Lounge
1990

11 - 938 W. Owens

Black Orchid
1965

