

Historical Review Las Vegas (Part 3)

(rs) The origin of the Las Vegas Boulevard, also called „The Strip“ is also an interesting matter. About 1940 Las Vegas has been a little town with less than 16.000 inhabitants. The casinos have been distributed in downtown with its ancient city core of Vegas. But the city saw now a real boom. Within of only 2 years the inhabitants amount doubled to 32.000.

In order to get to the casinos and Gambling Halls in downtown Las Vegas, one must be driving along the entire street that is known as Interstate 15 today. Of course it had only one street at that time that the latter had to become „The Strip“. The motorway was just built much later.

Due to a legend of Thomas Hull in Summer 1939 he was around in his car on his way from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. Because of a tyre flat on his car he had to stay for hours midst a glowing sun just before Las Vegas and was waiting for the mechanic, who should changed for tyres. While he then was waiting and waiting, he suddenly had the sensational idea! There were so many cars that have been all the time passing by on his way towards downtown Las Vegas. Why then not to building a Hotel-Casino, that already stands over here??? Why should of all gambler anybody come just to Old Las Vegas? Here there was enough place for hundreds of casinos – and the point in time was perfect.

This legendary flat was the milestone to uncountable hotel projects at the Las Vegas Boulevard. 1941 the El Rancho Hotel opened as the first casino at the freshly originated Las Vegas Boulevard. The Last Frontier hotel opened only a little bit later, on 30th October, 1942. Similar to the Meadows' Supper Club, so also El Rancho became a victim of a tragic fire. It never has been refurbished, as it was in its original form

once standing.

Benjamin Siegel, also known under the name "Bugsie" Siegel, opened in 1946 the Flamingo, about 12 km southbound from downtown Las Vegas. Also here there were some useful information to report of. At the beginning of the casino activities – with the introduction of the Assembly Bill 1931 – there was still not a basis in law, that would allow betting at sportive events like horse- or dog-racings over telegraphic lines and should legalise. This business began to boom only 10 years later and was in tight hands of the Trans America Wire Corporation that is located at the East Coast. Only who had access to these service, could go in the interregional betting business. Trans America Wire was controlled by Al Capone – and Benjamin Siegel was the representative of this company at the West Coast in Los Angeles. Together with his friend Moe Sedway, Ben Siegel came in 1941 to Las Vegas, in order to find a market and to promote the telegraphs' services. The perfect deal there was, as Trans America Wire Corporation owned the sole monopole. That meant, that Ben Siegel and his friends who had the sole control above the betting business. Regarded from that point was Las Vegas just the right place for Ben Siegel and his gangster friends. First of all Benjamin Siegel had to tie some contacts in order to get familiar with the local manners about the organised game of chance. So he bought himself a share at the El Cortez Hotel and Casino. Latterly his project for a elegant luxury hotel at the outskirts of south part of the city's Las Vegas Boulevard. While the most casinos in Las Vegas were built in the Wild West Style like with a little luxury, a missing swimming pool etc., so his project the Flamingo Hotel & Casino should triumph above any yet operating casinos. In January 1945 the building construction work for the major project began. The hotel has got his name from the Hollywood Starlet Virginia „Flamingo“ Hill, who was also Ben Siegel's sweetheart. The completion has cost uncountable amounts of money. Mayer Lansky and the rest of the Chicagoan mob had to put more money in the project, as

firstly planned, and furthermore Benjamin Siegel should have disposed of some shares from Flamingo, that were corresponding to the manifold of the value of the hotel. At the end should 300 % share's value have be circulating. The costs up to the completion were at the end about six millions Dollars, but at the beginning there was just a speech about only one million. The casino opened finally at the 26.th December, 1946. Against any warnings, that an opening around the Christmas time would be seldom a good idea, Ben Siegel believed the success and opened on the Second Christmas day. The Grand Opening Party was a spectacular occasion together with crowds of Hollywood Stars as there was William Holden, Ava Gardner, Jimmy Durante, und many others and otherwise prominent people. However everything should turn out to become a Flop. The High Rollers, that were necessary, in order to meet arrangements for great turnovers at the dice tables, in spite of the festivities did not happen and the casino lost money at its start. One of the possible causes therefore was the fact, that the 97 hotel rooms were not ready and so the guest had to stay the night in the El Rancho or Last Frontier nearby, where they have probably also their money. Another reason for the non-appearance of the guests was certainly also the by the management imposed Dress Code to the guests. A tie and a suit were necessary in order to be allowed to gamble in the Flamingo. This regulative should however be soon abandoned again.

Only within the opening period, within a few days the Flamingo lost over 100.000 Dollars, that has been at that time a substantial amount. For this reason everyone agreed on 1.st February, 1947, only one month after the opening of the Casino, for the momentary shut-down in order to finish the construction work. Two month later at the 27.th March 1947 many hotel rooms have been ready and the Casino opened the second time. But the bad luck did not seem to break up. The house lost further on money. Siegel's money supplier from the underground were already disillusioned and had the scepticism,

that Bugsie Siegel would embezzle over his friend Virginia Hill money out of the gamble winnings. Later Analysis have shown that Virginia Hill let open bank accounts in Zürich, where she sent the money and that of it she had bought real estate assets in Switzerland and Austria. On behalf of Meyer Lansky, one of the Mafia Bosses from Chicago, Benjamin Siegel has been murdered by a killer in his house in Beverly Hill. Virginia Hill had to give the money back, that she has brought to Europe and she committed a short time later suicide in Austria.

The funeral of Ben Siegel took place in a very modest surrounding with less than 10 attendants. It seemed how not just many friends Bugsie Siegel must had. Benjamin Siegel has been liquidated and at the same time, just still a few minutes before Ben Siegel was shot in his house in Los Angeles, 3 considerable leader of the organised crime entered the office rooms of the Flamingos' and took over the control. Among them were no one least than Gus Greenbaum, Morris Rosen and Moe Sedway.

Looking back it can be mentioned that the Flamingo was the origin start for a exploding growth in Las Vegas. It meant the returning point in history for games of chance. A luxury hotel after the other should from now on be built, and so it this trend still is during on. Important persons like Bob Stupak or Steve Wynn should impose to the city Las Vegas further characteristics, about whose we are still going to talk again. Other persons believed that with money alone they could get the complete control over Las Vegas bought, among them is e.g. Howard Hughes, about whom we will write in the next report.

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